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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001684

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - SYRIA - MIDDLE EAST
DEMOCRATIZATION IRAN
PARIS - MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

- [1](#)1. SYRIA - MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRATIZATION
- [1](#)2. IRAN

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

SYRIA'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON AND WASHINGTON'S SUPPORT TO THE EU-3 INITIATIVE WITH IRAN ARE TWO OF TODAY'S MAJOR INTERNATIONAL STORIES, WITH COMMENTATORS WIDENING THEIR SCOPE TO ANALYZE THE REALITY OF AN "ARAB SPRINGTIME." WHILE LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION ASKED ON SATURDAY'S FRONT PAGE: "AN ARAB SPRINGTIME?" EDITORIALIST MICHEL SCHIFRES ASSERTS THE PRESENCE OF "AN ARAB SPRINGTIME" IN LE FIGARO. BUT HE WARNS THAT "ISLAMISTS MAY ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS UNDERWAY." IN LE JOURNAL DU DIMANCHE GILLES DELAFON ALSO WONDERS WHETHER "BUSH IS THE SAVIOR OF THE ARABS," IN A COLUMN THAT NEVERTHELESS CONCLUDES THAT "THE WAR IN IRAQ, REMAINS A POLITICAL AND MILITARY FIASCO." "STILL," SAYS DELAFON, "THE PRAGMATISM WHICH DOMINATED PRESIDENT BUSH'S TRIP TO EUROPE CAN ALSO BE DETECTED IN WASHINGTON'S DECISION TO SUPPORT THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVE WITH IRAN." FOR PIERRE ROUSSELIN IN SATURDAY'S LE FIGARO, IN DEMONSTRATING SUPPORT FOR THE EU-3, "PRESIDENT BUSH IS HONORING HIS PROMISE MADE WHILE HE TOURED EUROPE." FOR RADIO COMMENTATOR BERNARD GUETTA, "BUSH IS DEFINITELY BECOMING MORE EUROPEAN." (SEE PART C)

THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION AND THE MAY 29 REFERENDUM ELICIT MANY COMMENTARIES ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. AS PART OF A SERIES ON "WHAT EUROPE DO WE WANT?" LE FIGARO INTERVIEWS FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: "WITH ITS EXPANSION TO THE EAST, EUROPE HAS PROVEN ITS ABILITY TO MANIPULATE SOFT POWER EXPANSION. BUT AS BOB KAGAN SAYS, EUROPE WILL ALSO NEED AT TIMES TO EXERCISE ITS HARD POWER. IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TWO ERRONEOUS THESES: EUROPE'S BELIEF THAT THE SOLE SOURCE OF INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY LIES WITH THE UN. AND AMERICA'S BELIEF THAT IT WAS DOING WHAT WAS BEST FOR THE COMMON GOOD AND THAT THE WORLD WOULD FINALLY RECOGNIZE THIS. I THINK THAT MOST AMERICANS WANT A EUROPEAN UNION THAT RESEMBLES THE U.S.: A FEDERATION OF STATES THAT CAN PLAY ITS ROLE ON THE WORLD SCENE. PRESIDENT BUSH'S SECOND TERM PROVES CLEARLY THAT THE AMERICANS SUPPORT EUROPE. AND IF THE AMERICANS ARE PUSHING FOR TURKEY'S EU MEMBERSHIP, IT IS NOT TO WEAKEN EUROPE BUT TO STRENGTHEN TURKEY. TURKEY IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT TO COUNTER THE TERRORIST THREAT AND THE CULTURAL DIVISIONS THAT FOLLOWED 9/11. IN ORDER TO DEFUSE THE DYNAMIC OF THE WORST, WE MUST INVENT IN MUSLIM NATIONS AN EQUIVALENT TO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

SYRIA - MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRATIZATION

"AN ARAB SPRINGTIME"

PIERRE ROUSSELIN IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/14):
"SYRIA'S DECISION TO PULLOUT FROM LEBANON MUST BE APPLAUDED. IT MARKS THE SUCCESS OF INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON SYRIA AND EMPHASIZES THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE LEBANESE PEOPLE. SYRIA'S PULLOUT WILL NOT RESOLVE EVERYTHING, IF ONLY BECAUSE BACHAR EL-ASSAD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON CONTINUING TO INFLUENCE LEBANON'S POLITICAL PROCESS. SIMILARLY, THE AMERICANS WILL NOT BE DONE WITH HIM. THEY SUSPECT HE FACILITATES BORDER CROSSING INTO IRAQ FOR ARMED MEN WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO FIGHT AGAINST THE COALITION. WHETHER THIS IS A COINCIDENCE OR A CONSEQUENCE, SYRIA'S DECISION IS COMING ON THE HEELS OF A WAR IN IRAQ AND THE TOPPLING OF SADDAM HUSSEIN. SO MUCH SO THAT WASHINGTON IS PREDICTING AN 'ARAB SPRINGTIME.' AS A CONSEQUENCE OF ITS STRATEGY AND THE CONFIRMATION THAT THE VIRUS OF DEMOCRACY HAS SPREAD, ALL OF WHICH MARKS THE BEGINNING OF BUSH'S GREATER MIDDLE EAST. IT WOULD BE VISCERALLY ANTI-AMERICAN NOT TO SEE THE ROLE PLAYED BY WASHINGTON IN THIS PROGRESS. ALL THE SIGNALS ARE ENCOURAGING, INCLUDING WASHINGTON'S LARGER ROLE IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT. BUT NOTHING PROVES THAT THE DEMOCRATS WILL COME OUT WINNING. THEY ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES THAT CAN BENEFIT FROM THESE CHANGES. SO CAN THE ISLAMISTS. THE WORST WOULD BE IF THIS DEMOCRATIC IMPROVEMENT LED TO THE

SUCCESS OF FUNDAMENTALISM."

"BURGEONING"

PATRICK SABATIER IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (03/12): "FOR TOO LONG WESTERN POWERS, WITH FRANCE IN THE LEAD, HAVE GIVEN THEIR SUPPORT TO THE STATUS QUO IN THE ARAB WORLD. BEN LADEN HAS OPENED THE EYES OF THE WORLD TO THE PERILS OF POLITICAL IMMOBILITY AND THE CORRUPTION WHICH SPUR ISLAMIC TERRORISM. THIS IS WHY WE MUST REJOICE IN THE MOVEMENT THAT IS TAKING PLACE, FROM IRAQ TO EGYPT, LEBANON, SAUDI ARABIA AND PALESTINE AND WHICH PRESIDENT BUSH SALUTES AS A 'WIND OF FREEDOM.' IT IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT TO SAY THAT THIS ANNOUNCES AN 'ARAB SPRINGTIME.' THE DOMINO THEORY WOULD BE DANGEROUS IF IT WERE USED IN REVERSE TO LEGITIMIZE THE WAR IN IRAQ. NOTHING GUARANTEES THAT DEMOCRACY WILL SOON FLOURISH IN THE ARAB WORLD. IT CAN JUST AS WELL GIVE SOME BITTER FRUIT. IN THE MIDDLE EAST IT OPENS THE DOOR TO CERTAIN SHIITE MINORITIES, AND TO THE PROPONENTS OF AN ISLAMIZATION OF SOCIETY. THIS MEANS THAT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS MAY NOT DO ANY BETTER IN TERMS OF LIBERTIES AND DEVELOPMENT. AN ELECTION DOES NOT MAKE A DEMOCRACY."

"BUSH, SAVIOR OF THE ARABS?"

GILLES DELAFON IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE JOURNAL DU DIMANCHE (03/13): "SOME KEEP SAYING 'BUSH WAS RIGHT.' THE WIND OF DEMOCRACY IS BLOWING IN THE MIDDLE EAST. WHILE WASHINGTON CAN LEGITIMATELY CONSIDER ITSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR STIRRING UP A HORNETS' NEST, IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS AND CERTAINLY PREMATURE TO CONSIDER ITSELF THE SOLE FATHER OF THE MOVEMENT. IF ONE LOOKS CLOSELY AT THE CHANGES IN THE REGION, THE PROGRESS OWES MORE TO THE ARAB POPULATION THAN TO THEIR AMERICAN BENEFACTOR. IN ORDER TO GIVE SUPPORT TO THIS POLITICAL PROGRESS, WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO MANIPULATE IT. THE PROCESS WILL BE A LONG ONE: IRAQ IS STILL A POLITICAL AND MILITARY FIASCO, AND IN LEBANON, HEZBOLLAH'S ROLE GIVES AN INDICATION OF WHAT MUST STILL BE OVERCOME. NEVERTHELESS, PRESIDENT BUSH CAME TO EUROPE LAST MONTH WITH A MORE PRAGMATIC APPROACH. THIS SAME PRAGMATISM HAS DICTATED WASHINGTON'S SUPPORT TO EUROPE'S INITIATIVE WITH IRAN."

IRAN

"THE EUROPEANS AND THE IRANIAN CHALLENGE"

PIERRE ROUSSELIN IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/12): "PRESIDENT BUSH HAS HONORED THE PROMISE HE MADE TO THE EUROPEANS DURING HIS RECENT TRIP. THE U.S. IS GOING TO SUPPORT EUROPE'S INITIATIVE WITH TEHERAN. THIS TRANSATLANTIC COMPROMISE WAS NECESSARY. WHILE IT MAY NOT BE ENOUGH TO BRING ABOUT IRAN'S REGIME, IT DOES GIVE A CHANCE TO DIPLOMACY AND NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO SAY THAT PRESIDENT BUSH BELIEVES ONLY IN THE USE OF FORCE. THE WEST IS WORKING HAND IN HAND. AND TEHERAN IS SENSITIVE TO INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE. WHILE WASHINGTON'S NEW ATTITUDE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO MAKE IRAN CHANGE ITS POSITION, IT WILL KEEP THE NEGOTIATIONS GOING. THE THREE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE A MAJOR ROLE TO PLAY, VIS-A-VIS WASHINGTON AND IRAN: CONVINCING BOTH PARTIES THAT A NEGOTIATED OUTCOME IS BEST FOR ALL. THE U.S. IS TOO HEAVILY COMMITTED IN IRAQ TO OFFER A CREDIBLE MILITARY OPTION CONCERNING IRAN. THIS EXPLAINS THE AMERICANS' NEW ATTITUDE. THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE LONG AND DIFFICULT. BUT CONSIDERING THE IRANIAN REGIME'S KEY ROLE IN THE REGION, FROM LEBANON TO AFGHANISTAN, AN OUTCOME CAN BE GUARANTEED ONLY IF IRAN IS REINSERTED IN THE REGIONAL POLITICAL ARENA." LEACH #